

Presidential initiative **NOT** signed

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**53rd Annual Federal**  
**Safety and Health Conference**  
**Los Angeles, California**  
**October 27, 1998**

I. I appreciate the Secretary's warm words of welcome and her strong support for worker safety and health—in the public as well as the private sector. And I'm delighted to be here today with Michael Kerr, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Workers' Compensation.

1• On behalf of President Clinton, Secretary Herman has challenged us to work together in a systematic way to reduce on-the-job injuries and illnesses for federal workers. President Clinton has signaled that he is serious about safety and health for federal workers. We expect to soon have a Presidential initiative signed that will set tough goals for reducing workplace injuries and illnesses.

1• We are committed to improving the worklives of 2 million public servants who care for our veterans, preserve our natural resources, safeguard our borders and defend our nation.

2• Most people think of government jobs as desk jobs. Many of us who work for Uncle Sam in Washington do spend most of our time in offices. Sounds safe enough.

1• Yet other federal workers operate heavy equipment, run printing presses, test nuclear weapons, and fight forest fires. They are exposed to hazardous chemicals. They have jobs that require repetitive motions. They may be threatened by criminals with guns.

1• As Secretary Herman said, workplace injuries and illnesses are costly. Workers suffer pain. Government business may be delayed. Agencies spend nearly \$2 billion from their appropriations each year to cover workers' compensation and medical costs alone.

1• President Clinton has made federal worker safety and health a priority. He has directed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to work with the Office of Workers Compensation Programs to get reduce injuries and lower costs. We will be looking for ways to partner with the unions representing public employees to achieve these objectives.

1• Federal agencies have long been required to adopt safety and health programs. They have been charged with conducting annual comprehensive safety and health inspections. They must respond to employee complaints. They must train federal employees to do their jobs safely.

1• For those who do an outstanding job, we have a new opportunity for recognition. Federal agencies can now participate in OSHA's premier partnership program—the Voluntary Protection Program. Today I signed the letter approving a NASA's Langley Research Center in

Hampton, Va., as the first federal site in VPP. More than 2,300 federal workers and 1,100 private contractors are protected by this site's excellent safety and health program.

1• Created in 1917 as the nation's first aviation research center, the 800-acre NASA facility has done an outstanding job in keeping its employees whole and healthy, despite such hazards as high voltage, temperature extremes and radiation. Langley has injury rates and lost workday injury and illness rates about 70 percent below those of similar private sector labs. We want to recognize other programs like this in the federal sector.

1• NASA has found the key to an effective safety and health program—management commitment and employee involvement. Federal Worker 2000 demands that commitment—of cabinet officers and agency managers. It also calls for meaningful employee participation.

1• One of my top priorities for the private sector is to develop a safety and health program standard. OSHA is now working on a proposal that would call for private sector companies to establish effective, ongoing systems to address safety and health in their workplaces. You already have such a requirement.

1• Federal agencies need to move to the next phase. We need to see that the programs we establish and the activities we undertake make a difference for workers.

1• Key to an effective safety and health program in the private sector is management commitment and employee involvement. That is true for federal agencies as well. We must demand that commitment—of cabinet officers and agency managers. We must also assure meaningful employee participation.

1• When we conduct inspections in the private sector, many organizations tell OSHA they have a safety program. We ask the manager to show us the program. Sometimes what they produce is a few faded and dog-eared posters and a dusty binder with some safety objectives that date back 20 years. When we ask employees about such a program, they rarely have much to say. Obviously, that's not the kind of program federal agencies should have—or the kind of program that offers any real value to the public servants you serve.

1• Real programs have real goals to measure progress. A dusty binder or a dog-eared poster isn't going to count for federal agencies either. It's not just effort that matters; it's results.

1• We know we have a ways to go—both in preventing human suffering and reducing the financial drain caused by injuries and illnesses.

1• Let me share some of our ideas with you in more detail. [Show Powerpoint presentation.]